



Testimony on HB 4465-4466
April 24, 2013

AFT Michigan believes in helping students with diverse career interests, including those that involve the construction trades. Career preparation requires taking the coursework and gaining the experiences necessary for success in these occupations. However, this goal needs to be balanced very carefully with the important goal of maintaining academic rigor. AFT Michigan supports setting high academic and educational expectations for all students and therefore career and technical coursework must be of high quality. In our country, it is very common for people to change their career goals throughout their life time, and we want to be sure that students' immediate opportunities do not preclude other, future opportunities.

For those reasons, AFT Michigan has mixed views on the two bills before you, HB 4465 and 4466 and cannot support HB 4465 as introduced. While quality career and technical coursework is a necessary pathway for many students, AFT Michigan is concerned about the proposed elimination of the foreign language requirement. Students need to be prepared for an increasingly global economy, and eliminating the foreign language requirement would be a step back from such preparation. AFT Michigan supports foreign language instruction at early grade levels because it makes developmental sense, but also believes studying cultures and through foreign language to be valuable component of well-rounded curriculum and a necessary part of college preparation. Eliminating it as a graduation requirement is short changing students.

Likewise, AFT Michigan does not support eliminating the physical education credit for students who are engaged in extracurricular athletics. It is no secret that inactivity and obesity are significant health problems for adults as well as for children and adolescents. Physical education and health and wellness help students develop healthy lifestyle habits. While there extracurricular activities valuable for students, they are not meant to supplant the learning experiences and expectations established in Physical Education curriculum.

AFT Michigan is somewhat more comfortable with the content of HB 4466 and certainly supports clarifying that there should be no arbitrary number—whether set at the state level or the local district level—limiting how many students receive personal curriculum plans. This decision should be student centered, with the input of parents and the professional guidance of counselors. It is an important decision and the implementation of a personal curriculum requires time and support from teachers and counselors. Understaffed districts will struggle to adequately support personal learning plans, but AFT Michigan believes that educational decisions should be driven by student needs.

AFT Michigan believes there is benefit to allowing students to fulfill their algebra II requirement through a high quality career and technical education or another quality career preparation program with further mathematics education embedded within it. It is important to assure that students take a legitimate replacement for Algebra II, and not merely a watered-down alternative. This will be effective policy if it is not used to lower student expectations but to clear a pathway for designing quality alternatives.

The current standards for high school graduation were put together thoughtfully and have been implemented throughout the state. We appreciate the number of hearings this committee is having on these two bills and the thoughtful consideration.

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